

SUBSTITUTE #6

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MOTION BY SUPERVISOR ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

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In 2010 the Los Angeles Opera will present Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. To mark the occasion, which will be the first time this epic, four-opera masterwork has been seen in its entirety in our county, the Opera and more than 75 arts, cultural and educational institutions will present "Ring Festival LA," a wide variety of exhibitions, performances, symposia and special events centered on the artistic, historical, and philosophical underpinnings of *The Ring*.

The festival is based on Wagner's original conception of the *Ring Cycle* as an artistic and cultural event that was to completely engage the city in which it was performed. Ring Festival LA hopes to achieve the same result. But any celebration of Richard Wagner's works must also consider the composer's bigoted and anti-Semitic behavior and writings, and the uses to which his music was put by Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Although Wagner died before Hitler was born, the fact that many people, myself included, associate his music with Nazism and anti-Semitism should not be ignored.

To their credit, the organizers of Ring Festival LA have made an exploration and discussion of Wagner's bigotry a significant part of the Festival. Their determination to do so is expressed in these terms on their website's home page:

MOTION

MOLINA _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

YAROSLAVSKY _____

ANTONOVICH _____

KNABE _____

“It is important to note here that while Richard Wagner is considered one of the most important and influential of all composers, he is also rightly reviled as having been an anti-Semite. Wagner’s writings on the subject percolated into German politics and popular culture and, decades after the composer’s death, were celebrated by Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich. It is the Company’s belief that opera has value not only as musical and theatrical entertainment, but as a way to gain important historical insight and to explore moral issues. Ring Festival LA will specifically address the subject of Wagner’s anti-Semitism in several contexts, including seminars, panel conversations and performances.”

At this point in time the Festival includes seminars and conferences at USC, UCLA and American Jewish University that will deal with the relationship between Wagner and the Jews, and between Wagner and fascism. Musical presentations will include the works of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms along with Wagner. In addition, there will be a concert that will explore the relationship between Wagner and his Jewish-born rival Mendelssohn; and another that links Wagner to his musical predecessors and followers, Jewish and gentile - those who considered themselves indebted to Wagner’s pioneering work and those who rebelled against it.

The Festival will also include the world premiere of a film documentary on the Wagner family that deals with issues of anti-Semitism and the Nazi connection. And, the Los Angeles Conservancy will offer a self-guided tour of historic sites in L.A. County where some of the greatest German artists, architects, and writers who sought refuge from Nazi persecution in the 1930s lived, worked and played.

It’s clear that the Festival is not envisioned as simply a celebration of Wagner’s life; but rather, as an examination of his influence on Western culture and society - for

better and for worse. It is not surprising that the Los Angeles Opera should be producing such an event. The LA Opera and its Music Director James Conlon are committed to bringing to the stage the work of two generations of European composers who were suppressed, forced to emigrate or executed by the Nazi regime. The Opera is widely known for its groundbreaking “Recovered Voices” series of operas by such composers.

The Los Angeles Opera has made a considerable effort to present Richard Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*, and to promote and stage Ring Festival LA, within the many contexts in which the composer has influenced our culture and our society.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors go on record in support of the Los Angeles Opera’s production of Richard Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*, and its presentation of Ring Festival LA as a series of events that will consider the composer in his totality, including not only his musical genius but also his despicable anti-Semitism and the appropriation of his music to serve the goals of fascism and Nazism; and urge the Opera to follow through on its plans to conduct the Festival in this manner; and

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Opera be urged to widely publicize the Festival and to seek the broadest possible audience for both the Festival and the operas themselves; and in so doing to not only ensure the success of the operatic performances, but also to educate the public about the life and times of Richard Wagner in all of its contexts.